

The Czech Republic's Report on Implementation of Participation

Chapter 1 - The situation at the national level at the time of adoption of common objectives

On 7 April 2003 the Czech government adopted, in the form of a resolution, a Governmental Policy Concept on Children and Youth through 2007 (hereinafter “the Governmental Policy Concept”). The material is focused on the most important area of the state policy related to children and young people and its implementation constitutes one of the aspects of participation that are being monitored. The Governmental Policy Concept and the tasks set out in an annex to the draft government resolution were formulated as a joint effort by representatives of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Ministry of the Environment, Ministry of Culture, Ministry of the Interior and the Ministry of Health, and by representatives of the umbrella children and youth organisation in the CR – the Czech Children and Youth Council. The Governmental Policy Concept follows up on the priorities and main propositions of the White Paper of the EC “New Impetus for European Youth“, which was adopted in November 2001, and elaborates on them in line with the conditions in the Czech Republic.

The research conducted as part of the Governmental Policy Concept development suggested that young people in the CR are not indifferent to what is happening around them. Many of them show altruism and over half of them would like to take part in projects aimed at helping groups in need. Young people saw a problem in that participation of young people in the public life in the CR does not receive appropriate attention. Young people are not able to influence the traditional forms of political participation in the political domain which they are entering, and feel squeezed out of the decision-making processes.

Various forms of participation had been developing before the Governmental Policy Concept was adopted. The traditional governance structures for children and young people in the CR have always taken the form of self-governance of pupils at schools. Successful approaches include school performances, leisure groups, pupil assemblies and election of their representatives. Outside of school pupils organise, via their representative bodies, discussions with public officials, visit companies and take part in public welfare activities.

Gradually, a network of regional parliaments has been set up, as well as a system for information and consultation services provision both for the parliaments and the general public. The national media campaign “Decide about Yourself!” to promote the general sense of participation was very successful. The campaign took place in August and September 2003 and focused on four major strategic target groups – children aged 12-16, young people aged 16-26, children and youth who are not members of any organisations, and the general public. The campaign promoted the opportunity for speaking up on topical issues, the right to co-decide on common issues, the responsibility towards oneself and other people, towards the family, school, community and the state. The project came to a head with a meeting of the

National Children and Youth Parliament on 25-29 October 2003 which was attended by regional parliaments' representatives. The first session of the National Children and Youth Parliament was held in 1998 and its core was formed by 7 cities with well-functioning children and youth assemblies. The output was a resolution dealing with "A Proposal for Child and Pupil's Rights, and for Children and Youth's Leisure". In the following years the National Parliament was concerned with the following topics: "Ecology; Children and Youth in the Media – the influence of media on public opinion", "Convention on the Rights of the Child; the European Union; School Reform; Children and Youth's Leisure; Rights and Obligations of Children and Young People". The projects such as the National Children and Youth Parliament or local parliaments of children and young people have always formed an important contribution towards education for citizenship and participation.

One important aspect of participation is the work with children and youth pursued by non-government organisations which young people set up and in which they are associated. These organisations have considerable effects on the process of children and youth's maturing, and their attitudes and opinions. In this way they complement the impact of the family, school and other entities. The state has been spending increasing amounts of resources to support non-government organisations of children and young people. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports (MoEYS) allocated to them some 179 million CZK in 2002. The amounts were 199 million CZK, 207 million and 214 million in 2003, 2004 and 2005 respectively.

In 2003 there were two competing umbrella associations of children and youth in the Czech Republic, both striving to achieve the title of a national youth council. At regional level there were several independent children and youth councils. At present the function of the national council is performed by the Czech Children and Youth Council.

Municipalities also pursue systematic co-operation with young people. Many of them organise regular events related to children and youth participation which are attended by mayors, councillors or municipal authority representatives. Moreover, municipalities often provide systematic financial support for such projects implemented by non-government non-profit organisations.

The implementation of the tasks set out in the Governmental Policy Concept is evaluated biennially, and tasks for the following period are formulated. The evaluation is a joint effort of various ministries and the Czech Children and Youth Council. The outcomes of the evaluation of the 2003-2004 period and the tasks for 2005/2006 were approved by a government resolution of 26.1.2005. The issue of participation continues to be one of the key priorities set out in the Governmental Policy Concept – not only in view of the EU Council Resolution on common objectives for participation by and information for young people.

Moreover, representatives of young people can influence participation within the Youth Chamber which has been set up as a consultative body to the minister of education, youth and sports in the area of children and youth in 2001. Its members include, apart from representatives of the Czech Children and Youth Council and its associations, representatives of regions and some ministries. However, the Youth

Chamber did not meet between June 2004 and November 2005 and did not carry out any activities.

In 2002 the CR became the tenth country where the international programme “Make a Connection” was launched. The bodies responsible for its implementation are the Foundation for the Development of Civil Society and Nokia in co-operation with local partners. The programme is designed for groups of young people aged 16-24 who can promote own projects and apply for a grant of 50 thousand CZK. The projects must be focused predominantly on the local community – an environment where the young people live and for which the project should bring benefits (e.g. seminars, student parliaments, workshops, amateur performances, environmental projects, cultural events). Eight-member groups develop projects on a voluntary basis subject to no financial reward as the grant may only be spent on the project implementation. In 2002 there were 53 projects which received some 1.7 million CZK. In 2003 approximately 2 mil. CZK was allocated to support 73 projects, 75 projects received 1.9 million CZK in 2004 and in 2005 there were 79 projects financed by an amount of some 1.9 million CZK.

Chapter 2 – Activities undertaken at national level since the adoption of the common objectives (according to objectives and directions)

- a) increase participation by young people in the civic life of their community (communities)
- b) increase participation by young people in the system of representative democracy
- c) provide greater support for various forms of learning to participate

As part of the development of the Governmental Policy Concept and the formulation of the tasks for the following period a considerable emphasis was placed on support for participation at schools, in associations and communities, and on support for specific projects such as the National Children and Youth Parliament in the CR or local children and youth parliaments. If young people are to participate in the public life, they must acquire or develop certain competencies to this end. As part of the gradual learning process a decisive, concrete action within their environment is necessary – i.e. in school, municipality, association, etc. At local level it is possible, by means of participation, to achieve specific changes which young people can see immediately. At this level they can not only express their opinions, but also play a direct role in decision-making processes.

Organised participation by young people at local level in the CR takes two forms – children and youth parliaments constitute an independent initiative on the part of young people; children and youth assemblies are organised by municipalities and imitate the work of municipal assemblies.

In 2003 the Council of the National Children and Youth Parliament was set up as a body representing children and youth parliaments. This was an initiative on the part of children and young people and a response to the unsatisfactory attitudes of young people, their lack of interest in public affairs and the current political scene, and communication barriers. The main objective was to organise elections to pupil and

student self-governing bodies, and municipal and regional youth assemblies. At the same time, the elected representatives became members of the National Children and Youth Parliament.

In 2003 first Regional Children and Youth Parliaments were set up which complement the existing structure of children and youth parliaments in the CR and contribute to a better communication between the grassroots organisations and the National Children and Youth Parliament.

The MoEYS spent some 725 thousand CZK in 2003 and some 435 thousand CZK in 2004 to support the National Children and Youth Parliament (another 400 thousand CZK were allocated to support so-called “round tables”). In 2005 the support has amounted to 100 thousand CZK (another 80 thousand was earmarked for the “Children Congress”, 185 thousand for “round tables” and a methodological manual on simulated election, and 30 thousand CZK was designed to support “discussion tables”). The MoEYS support has decreased over recent years in view of the fact that these activities have been funded from other sources as well (i.e. regional authorities). In 2003 the National Children and Youth Parliament was concerned with the issue “The Rights and Obligations of Pupils”, in 2004 it was “School Regulations and the European Constitutions”, and in 2005 it has dealt with the Youth programme.

The MoEYS also provides financial support for the meetings of the European Youth Parliament (EYM), which is a national commission of the Europe-wide organisation EYP Intl. (European Youth Parliament International). The main mission of the EYP is to disseminate and promote the activities of the EYP Intl. in the CR. One of the main EYP activities is to select secondary schools for international sessions of the EYP Intl. This is associated with fund-raising to support the participation of Czech delegations in these sessions. The programme is designed for secondary school students. The Czech delegation consists of six students and an accompanying teacher of the same school. A national tender is organised annually by the EYM to select the candidates.

As school is the first institution where young people can learn about participation methods, the law on pre-school, basic, secondary, tertiary professional and other education (the Schools Act) stipulates conditions stimulating interest in the support for pupil self-governing bodies on the part of schools. The law, which came into effect on 1.1.2005, makes it possible for pupils and students to set up self-governing bodies at school level, and to use them to approach the school director. The school director is obliged to deal with the positions and statements of these bodies. Pupils and students also have the right to take a position on all decisions which concern essential issues related to their education, while their positions must receive attention that is appropriate to their age and stage of development.

The MoEYS budget earmarked to support non-government non-profit children and youth organisations was some 199 million CZK in 2003, 207 million in 2004 and approximately 214 million in 2005. This budget is designed to fund both the organisations’ regular activities, and development and innovative efforts (e.g. youth participation in social and political affairs, voluntary work, work with talented young people, ad-hoc events for non-organised children and young people, etc.).

As the Group of Children and Youth Associations ceased to exist in 2004, the Czech Children and Youth Council became the only official umbrella organisation/national council for young people in the Czech Republic and has since been performing this function. Currently it associates 97 organisations with over 200 thousand members. It pursues intensive co-operation with the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports and acts as a partner to regional children and youth councils, some of which are its members, and supports their co-ordinating activities.

Following the EU Council Resolution on common objectives for participation by and information for young people the MoEYS initiated, for the 2004-2005 period and in co-operation with the Czech Children and Youth Council, a competition for collectives of children and young people entitled “Be There”. The main objective of the competition was to present and evaluate project which pursue active involvement of young people in the public life, their co-operation and national and international levels, support for democracy and elimination of all forms of discrimination. The common denominator for all competitors was “solidarity” – i.e. the projects were supposed to encourage the interest on the part of young people in other individuals, to support their competencies in dealing with them for their own benefit and to share their interests. The project promoters included individuals or groups and the project focus was, for example, work with children and young people, international solidarity, health, the environment, sports, culture, employment, etc. In 2004 the winning projects in four categories and one project which the jury praised as being inventive proceeded to the European round of the competition which took place in autumn in France. The award ceremony at the national level was attended by the minister of education, youth and sports. In 2005 the winning projects at the national level were presented and acknowledged within the European Youth Week.

As part of the “Make a Connection” programme (see chapter 1), 73 projects received funding of 2 million CZK in 2003. In 2004 75 projects were allocated some 1.9 million CZK and in 2005 a total of 1.9 million CZK was allocated to 79 projects.

The National Children and Youth Parliament and the DUHA civic association in co-operation with the National Institute for Children and Youth, which is an organisation directly managed by the MoEYS, continue implementation of the “Participation” project (www.participace.cz). The project aims at supporting, among other issues, citizenship, democracy and solidarity. Since 1998 over 1 thousand children and young people and over 100 adults have been trained. A number of methodological materials were issued in recent years (Participation of Young People in the Life of Society, Children and Youth Parliaments, Participation of European Communities and Regions in the Development of Leisure Activities for Young Generations), and a series of methodological seminars took place.

Since 2002 the Educational Programme for Staff at Leisure Centres for Children and Youth which deals with participation has been underway. Its implementation is the responsibility of the Institute for Education as Leisure of the MoEYS (which has been merged with the National Institute for Children and Youth – NIDM). This is a pilot programme which show participation as a method for working with children and young people in the area of governance. Approximately 150 directors and members of staff of the leisure centres have been trained.

In 2003 the staff of the Institute for Education as Leisure were involved in the organisation of the nation-wide presentation of children and youth associations “Bambiriáda”, which was the responsibility of the Czech Children and Youth Council. Moreover, they took part in organisation of the “Children and Youth Congress” at the Senate of the Czech Republic. The objective of the Congress was to appeal to the broadest possible spectrum of young people by means of a simulative game entitled “The New Face of Europe”. The main objective was to encourage children and young people to take interest in the EU enlargement issues and provide them with balanced and relevant information in a most comprehensible manner. The Congress was concluded at the Senate of the CR in the form of a simulative EU session. The Institute for Education as Leisure co-ordinated the event and its staff attended the session. The Children and Youth Congress formed an integral part of “Bambiriáda” in 2004 and 2005 as well, and the Czech Children and Youth Council envisages that this traditions should continue in years to come.

Non-formal education related to participation also includes meetings of young people focusing on exchange of experience, cultural views and opinions. At the national level there is a tradition of so-called “Nation-Wide Exchanges of Experience among Group Leaders” in which hundreds of young volunteers take part. They attend seminars, workshops and discussions in order to learn and acquire new stimuli for the work of their organisations. International exchanges of young people are funded, apart from other sources, from the MoEYS programme for state support for work with children and youth designed for non-government non-profit organisations.

In November 2004 the MoEYS children and youth department organised an international conference of the four Visegrad countries on youth legislation issues. One of the main conference topics was implementation of the common objectives for participation by and information for young people resulting from the EU Council Resolution. The conference was attended by representatives of ministries of various member countries, representatives of national youth councils and national youth institutes. They exchanged practical experience in the area of participation.

A number of participation-related projects were also supported as part of the Youth programme. In 2005 support was provided, for example, for the following projects: “*Participation of Children and Youth Parliaments in the Moravskoslezský Region*” (launching mutual co-operation and joint initiatives of the parliaments in the region); and “*The Council of Juniors in Ústí nad Labem*” (providing young people with information about the non-profit sector, developing and supporting small-scale projects depending on the initiatives and needs of young people at the age of secondary schooling, and launching international co-operation on expert projects with partner organisations in Slovakia). Other projects which received support included: “*Simulated Elections in Žatec*” (enhancing motivation of young people at secondary schools to take part in the elections), “*The Development of Civic Virtues in Secondary School Students in the Ústecký Region*” (supporting and motivating young people to get involved in voluntary work for the benefit of local communities, and developing own voluntary projects), and “*A Chat at the Table*” (teaching young people the art of discussion by means of leading discussions with important public figures).

Various important events related to participation were held as part of the European Youth Week in the CR in 2005. In autumn and winter of 2005 a number of events

were organised by various bodies – e.g. by the National Youth Agency, the Czech Children and Youth Council, National Children and Youth Parliament, information centres for young people, regions and municipalities at national, regional and local levels. These activities include discussions with members of children and youth parliaments at regional and local levels, discussions with politicians, exhibitions of youth projects, competitions, etc. Non-organised young people also took part through the information centres for young people.

In November 2005 a session of the National Children and Youth Parliament was held. During autumn 2005 some 50 “round tables” were organised at the initiative of this body. In this way young people got a chance to discuss various topics of interest with politicians or artists. These activities took place in all regions of the CR.

In order to support events in the spirit and as part of the European Youth Week 2005 the MoEYS initiated, as part of the programme for state support for the work with children and youth designed for non-government non-profit organisations, additional grant schemes for 2004-2006. The grants have been allocated to 9 projects. The main topics discussed are “active citizenship”, the “European Youth Pact” and “Youth and Europe”. The projects also involved young people with limited opportunities, minorities and non-organised youth. Broader discussion with young people was also supported as part of special grant scheme.

In October 2005 a press conference of the minister of education, youth and sports was held on the occasion of the European Youth Week 2005.

Furthermore, the MoEYS repeatedly provided information to regional representatives and heads of centres for leisure of children and youth about the European Youth Week 2005, and called for their involvement in the form of their own activities. The Council of Regions and Leisure Centres took initiative and prepared an extensive, diverse and attractive agenda (e.g. meetings of young people with important figures of social and cultural life and members of local governments, exhibitions, informative seminars, projections, competitions, workshops, etc.).

The European Youth Week 2005 came to a head in the CR with a series of events YOUWENT (YOUth Week EvENT). It included a number of activities, e.g. award of prizes for the best projects within the Youth Programme and the winners of the “Be There” competition, and other interesting events for young people.

The activities described above cannot be strictly classified according to categories determined by the Council Resolution, as many of them fulfil more than one function or interlink. Enhanced participation of young people in the lives of their communities is undoubtedly one of the results of the work of local children and youth parliaments and assemblies, pupil self-government bodies, round tables, children and youth associations, projects within the “Make Connection!” programme, Bambiriáda, etc. Participation of young people in the system of representative democracy is promoted, apart from local and regional children and youth parliaments and assemblies, by organisations such as the National Children and Youth Parliament, European Youth Parliament, Children and the Youth Congress as part of Bambiriáda. Various forms of learning to participate were supported, among other things, by the project “Participation” of the National Children and Youth Institute and the DUHA civic

association, and the educational programme for the staff of leisure centres for children and youth. Exchanges of young people also play an important role in this area, which are part of the MoEYS programme supporting non-government non-profit children and youth organisations.

Chapter 3 – Activities designed to identify the existing awareness of participation, and to promote measures to complement and update the information available and to make it more accessible

The awareness of organised participation as part of children and youth parliaments is being continuously monitored in connection with the media campaign – particularly by means of personal consultations at all levels of the “Participation” programme and by means of questionnaires and their evaluation. In November 2005 84 elected members of the National Children and Youth Parliament met in order to fill in a questionnaire to charter the existing level of awareness.

At the beginning of 2006 a working group for implementation of the European Youth Pact and support for participation will begin its operations. Its members will include representatives of the MoEYS youth department, the Czech Children and Youth Council, National Children and Youth Parliament, the Czech National Youth Agency, the Foundation for the Development of Civic Society (the “Make a Connection!” programme), and representatives of children and youth centres.

As part of the “Participation” programme the MoEYS supports publication of a number of methodological materials focusing on participation: “Participation of Children and Youth in the Life of Society – Desire, Need or Real Opportunity?”, “Children and Youth Parliaments”, “Children and Youth Parliaments – Elections, Decide about Yourself”, “Participation of Children and Youth in the Life of Society – European Structures and Their Activities”, “Participation of European Communities and Regions in Development of Leisure Activities for Young Generations”, and a multi-lingual leaflet entitled “Participation”. A series of methodological seminars was organised. The website www.participation.cz contains all information about the programme and presents specific activities and opportunities for involvement. The development of the programme required that the websites be improved and the text adjusted to user needs. The improved information system at the level of the National Children and Youth Parliament has resulted in better communication between its basic components.

One important turning point as regards the improvement of information flows towards children and adults was the successful media campaign in 2003 entitled “Elections – Decide about Yourself”, which was part to the regular elections to the National Children and Youth Parliament. A poster was placed in transport means of the Prague Transportation Company, at all schools, Children and Youth Centres, Leisure Centres and Information Centres for Young People in the Czech Republic.

Information Centres for Young People make a major contribution as regards the provision of information in various areas of the life of children and youth. Many of

their activities in the spirit of the European Youth Week 2005 were supported from additional grants of the MoEYS within the programme for support designed for non-government non-profit organisations working with children and youth.

The provision of information to young people is an important step towards the actual participation. The activities in this area focus on publication of youth magazines, peer programmes (bullying, drugs, violence, HIV), discussions (“round tables”) with public figures, competitions and events on the occasion of various European days (the Day of the Earth, European Youth Week, Day without Cars, etc.). Moreover, there are educational and entertainment events focused on specific themes which appeal to teenagers. Up-to-date information is available at the web portal of the Czech Children and Youth Council (www.adam.cz).

The Czech Children and Youth Council issued, in spring 2005, a Czech translation of the Revised European Charter of Participation of Young People in the Life of Towns and Regions as a supplement to the Archa bulletin (http://www.crdm.cz/download/archa/2005/Archa_3_05_vnitni_priloha.pdf). The translation is subject to further work and dissemination.

In 2005 the Pionýr association issued, with the support from the Community Youth programme, a publication entitled “The Life of a Group – A Book on Participation”. There are Czech and English versions in a hard copy and on the Internet (English - <http://www.pionyr.org/participace/eng/index.htm>) and the publication provides a background for reflecting on the existing rate of participation in associations, and gives examples of how to make it easier for young people to co-decide on issues within their associations.

Junák, the Union of Boy and Girl Scouts in the CR, carried out, in 2003, professional research into the interest on the part of young people in membership (participation) in children and youth associations. Its results were also presented at the conference “Volunteers, Education and Upbringing outside School” (see http://www.crdm.cz/download/archa/2004/Archa_5_04_vnitni_priloha.pdf).

The association AFS Inter-cultural Programmes took part in an international study on the impact of long-term educational mobility of secondary school students (focus on a specific study programme) on their personal development (inter-cultural competencies, language skills, understanding other cultures, inter-personal and inter-cultural relations, etc.). The study was developed by a team of American scientists led by professor M.R.Hammer, PhD. The results of the research are generally applicable to most examples of long-term educational mobility of young people (see <http://www.afs.org/AFSI/pdfs/assessment.pdf>)

Chapter 4 – Ways of working with young people in relation to implementation of the common objectives and the development of the report

The implementation of the objectives was not co-ordinated in a coherent manner, mainly because the Youth Chamber failed to operate. Independent activities of

children and youth civic associations were supported. Better co-ordination is planned for 2006 within the working group for implementation of the European Youth Pact and support for participation.

The report was developed by a working group consisting of representatives of the MoEYS, the National Children and Youth Institute, the Czech Children and Youth Council, the National Children and Youth Parliament and the Czech National Youth Agency. The relevant information was provided, among others, by young people involved in the “Participation” programme and members of various children and youth associations.

Chapter 5 – Obstacles to implementation of the objectives and activities at the national level

Project organisers most often mention lack of financial resources to support participation-related projects, a low level of recognition and social prestige for those who volunteer to work with children and young people, inappropriate legislation on local governments as regards the support for participation of children and young people. Moreover, they say that young people are not considered to be equal partners in discussions.

Chapter 6 – The effects identified and expected

The activities in the area of participation at the national level are not co-ordinated. Apart from the operations of the National Children and Youth Parliament, participation takes place on a spontaneous basis in the non-government non-profit sector.

The long-term plan has been to involve all regions and the highest possible number of municipalities in various projects within the “Participation” programme. At present 13 regions (out of 14) are involved and so are 130 municipalities with extended powers. By the end of 2006 we expect all regions to participate.

It is expected that the operations of the ad-hoc working group for implementation of the European Youth Pact and support for participation, which should be launched in the early 2006, should contribute to a better mapping of participation-related activities and expanding the opportunities for exchanges of good practices (see chapter 3).

Chapter 7 – The most useful and the least useful activities, activities which were the easiest and the most difficult, and proposals for activities to be added, changed or omitted

In the Czech Republic we have good experience with two types of participation:

1. an organised system of children and youth parliaments at all levels
2. a traditional and still high level of participation of children and youth in their organisations.

Both types of participation receive financial support from the state. There is room for improvement primarily as regards co-ordination on the part of organisers of various activities.

It is worthwhile to support and develop, above all, long-term activities. One-off short events with no long-term impact and prospects are less useful.

It is very difficult to say which events were the easiest and the most difficult, as this depends entirely on the competencies of the organiser, the level of financial support, and the anticipated result of the event.